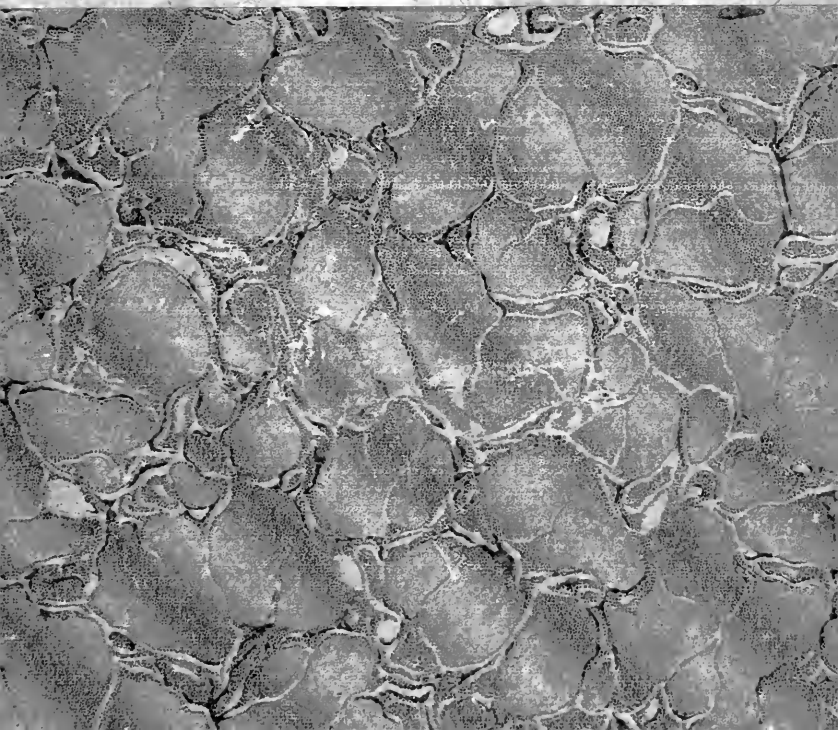


Renewal of Youth

George William Russell





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THE
RENEWAL OF YOUTH

BY

A. E.

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THE RENEWAL OF YOUTH.

I.

*I am a part of all that I have met :
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleanings that untravelled world . . .
. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.*—ULYSSES.

HUMANITY is no longer the child it was at the beginning of the world. The spirit which, prompted by some divine intent, flung itself long ago into a vague, nebulous, drifting nature, though it has endured through many periods of youth, maturity, and age, has yet had its own transformations. Its gay, wonderful childhood gave way, as cycle after cycle coiled itself into slumber, to more definite purposes, and now it is old and burdened with experiences. It is not an age that quenches its fire, but it will not renew again the activities which gave it wisdom. And so

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it comes that men pause with a feeling which they translate into weariness of life before the accustomed joys and purposes of their race. They wonder at the spell which induced their fathers to plot and execute deeds which seem to them to have no more meaning than a whirl of dust. But their fathers had this weariness also and concealed it from each other in fear, for it meant the laying aside of the sceptre, the toppling over of empires, the chilling of the household warmth, and all for a voice whose inner significance revealed itself but to one or two among myriads.

The spirit has hardly emerged from the childhood with which nature clothes it afresh at every new birth, when the disparity between the garment and the wearer becomes manifest: the little tissue of joys and dreams woven about it is found inadequate for shelter: it trembles exposed to the winds blowing out of the unknown. We linger at twilight with some companion, still glad, contented, and in tune with the nature which fills the orchards with blossom, and sprays the hedges with dewy blooms. The laughing lips give utterance to wishes—ours until that moment. Then the spirit, without warning, suddenly falls into immeasurable age: a sphynx-like face looks at us: our lips answer, but far from

the region of elemental being we inhabit, they syllable in shadowy sound, out of old usage, the response, speaking of a love and a hope which we know have vanished from us for evermore. So hour by hour the scourge of the infinite drives us out of every nook and corner of life we find pleasant. And this always takes place when all is fashioned to our liking: then into our dream strides the wielder of the lightning: we get glimpses of a world beyond us thronged with mighty, exultant beings: our own deeds become infinitesimal to us: the colours of our imagination, once so shining, grow pale as the living lights of God glow upon them. We find a little honey in the heart which we make sweeter for some one, and then another lover, whose forms are legion, sighs to us out of its multitudinous being: we know that the old love is gone. There is a sweetness in song or in the cunning reïmaging of the beauty we see; but the Magician of the Beautiful whispers to us of his art, how we were with him when he laid the foundations of the world, and the song is unfinished, the fingers grow listless. As we receive these intimations of age our very sins become negative: we are still pleased if a voice praises us, but we grow lethargic in enterprises where the spur to

activity is fame or the acclamation of men. At some point in the past we may have struggled mightily for the sweet incense which men offer to a towering personality : but the infinite is for ever within man : we sighed for other worlds and found that to be saluted as victor by men did not mean acceptance by the gods.

But the placing of an invisible finger upon our lips when we would speak, the heart-throb of warning where we would love, that we grow contemptuous of the prizes of life, does not mean that the spirit has ceased from its labours, that the high-built beauty of the spheres is to topple mistily into chaos, as a mighty temple in the desert sinks into the sand, watched only by a few barbarians too feeble to renew its ancient pomp and the ritual of its once shining congregations. Before we, who were the bright children of the dawn, may return as the twilight race into the silence, our purpose must be achieved, we have to assume mastery over that nature which now overwhelms us, driving into the Fire-fold the flocks of stars and wandering fires. Does it seem very vast and far away ? Do you sigh at the long, long time ? Or does it appear hopeless to you who perhaps return with trembling feet evening after evening from

a little labour? But it is behind all these things that the renewal takes place, when love and grief are dead; when they loosen their hold on the spirit and it sinks back into itself, looking out on the pitiful plight of those who, like it, are the weary inheritors of so great destinies: then a tenderness which is the most profound quality of its being springs up like the outlying of the dawn, and if in that mood it would plan or execute it knows no weariness, for it is nourished from the First Fountain. As for these feeble children of the once glorious spirits of the dawn, only a vast hope can arouse them from so vast a despair, for the fire will not invigorate them for the repetition of petty deeds but only for the eternal enterprise, the war in heaven, that conflict between Titan and Zeus which is part of the never-ending struggle of the human spirit to assert its supremacy over nature. We, who lie, crushed by this mountain nature piled above us, must arise again, unite to storm the heavens and sit on the seats of the mighty.

II.

WE speak out of too petty a spirit to each other ; the true poems, said Whitman :

*" Bring none to his or to her terminus or to be content
and full,
Whom they take they take into space to behold the
birth of stars, to learn one of the meanings,
To launch off with absolute faith, to sweep through
the ceaseless rings and never be quiet again."*

Here is inspiration—the voice of the soul. Every word which really inspires is spoken as if the Golden Age had never passed. The great teachers ignore the personal identity and speak to the eternal pilgrim. Too often the form or surface far removed from beauty makes us falter, and we speak to that form and the soul is not stirred. But an equal temper arouses it. To whoever hails in it the lover, the hero, the magician, it will respond, but not to him who accosts it in the name and style of its outer self. How often do we not long to break through the veils which divide us from some one, but custom, convention, or a fear of being misunderstood prevent

us, and so the moment passes whose heat might have burned through every barrier. Out with it—out with it, the hidden heart, the love that is voiceless, the secret tender germ of an infinite forgiveness. That speaks to the heart. That pierces through many a vesture of the Soul. Our companion struggles in some labyrinth of passion. We help him, we think, with ethic and moralities. Ah, very well they are; well to know and to keep, but wherefore? For their own sake? No, but that the King may arise in his beauty. We write that in letters, in books, but to the face of the fallen who brings back remembrance? Who calls him by his secret name? Let a man but feel for what high cause is his battle, for what is his cyclic labour, and a warrior who is invincible fights for him and he draws upon divine powers. Our attitude to man and to nature, expressed or not, has something of the effect of ritual, of evocation. As our aspiration so is our inspiration. We believe in life universal, in a brotherhood which links the elements to man, and makes the glow-worm feel far off something of the rapture of the seraph hosts. Then we go out into the living world, and what influences pour through us! We are “at league with the stones of the field.” The winds of the world blow radiantly

upon us as in the early time. We feel wrapt about with love, with an infinite tenderness that caresses us. Alone in our rooms as we ponder, what sudden abysses of light open within us! The Gods are so much nearer than we dreamed. We rise up intoxicated with the thought, and reel out seeking an equal companionship under the great night and the stars.

Let us get near to realities. We read too much. We think of that which is "the goal, the Comforter, the Lord, the Witness, the resting-place, the asylum and the Friend." Is it by any of these dear and familiar names? The soul of the modern mystic is becoming a mere hoarding place for uncomely theories. He creates an uncouth symbolism, and plasters his soul within with names drawn from the Kabala or ancient Sanskrit, and makes alien to himself the intimate powers of his spirit, things which in truth are more his than the beatings of his heart. Could we not speak of them in our own tongue and the language of to-day will be as sacred as any of the past. From the Golden One, the child of the divine, comes a voice to its shadow. It is stranger to our world, aloof from our ambitions, with a destiny not here to be fulfilled. It says: "You are of dust while I am robed in opal-

escent airs. You dwell in houses of clay, I in a temple not made by hands. I will not go with thee, but thou must come with me." And not alone is the form of the divine aloof but the spirit behind the form. It is called the Goal truly, but it has no ending. It is the Comforter, but it waves away our joys and hopes like the angel with the flaming sword. Though it is the Resting-place, it stirs to all heroic strife, to outgoing, to conquest. It is the Friend indeed, but it will not yield to our desires. Is it this strange, unfathomable self we think to know, and awaken to, by what is written, or by study of it as so many planes of consciousness? But in vain we store the upper chambers of the mind with such quaint furniture of thought. No archangel makes his abode therein. They abide only in the shining. No wonder that the Gods do not incarnate. We cannot say we do pay reverence to these awful powers. We repulse the living truth by our doubts and reasonings. We would compel the Gods to fall in with our petty philosophy rather than trust in the heavenly guidance. Ah, to think of it, those dread deities, the divine Fires, to be so enslaved! We have not comprehended the meaning of the voice which cried, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord," or this, "Lift

up your heads, O ye gates. Be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." Nothing that we read is useful unless it calls up living things in the soul. To read a mystic book truly is to invoke the powers. If they do not rise up plumed and radiant, the apparitions of spiritual things, then is our labour barren. We only encumber the mind with useless symbols. They knew better ways long ago. "Master of the Green-waving Planisphere, . . . Lord of the Azure Expanse, . . . it is thus we invoke," cried the magicians of old.

And us, let us invoke them with joy, let us call upon them with love, the Light we hail, or the Divine Darkness we worship with silent breath. That silence cries aloud to the Gods. Then they will approach us. Then we may learn that speech of many colours, for they will not speak in our mortal tongue; they will not answer to the names of men. Their names are rainbow glories. Yet these are mysteries and they cannot be reasoned out or argued over. We cannot speak truly of them from report, or description, or from what another has written. A relation to the thing in itself alone is our warrant, and this means we must set aside our intellectual self-sufficiency and await guidance. It will

surely come to those who wait in trust, a glow, a heat in the heart announcing the awakening of the Fire. And, as it blows with its mystic breath into the brain, there is a hurtling of visions, a brilliance of lights, a sound as of great waters vibrant and musical in their flowing, and murmurs from a single yet multitudinous being. In such a mood, when the far becomes near, the strange familiar, and the infinite possible, he wrote from whose words we get the inspiration :

"To launch off with absolute faith, to sweep through the ceaseless rings and never be quiet again."

Such a faith and such an unrest be ours : faith which is mistrust of the visible ; unrest which is full of a hidden surety and reliance. We, when we fall into pleasant places, rest and dream our strength away. Before every enterprise and adventure of the soul we calculate in fear our power to do. But remember, "Oh, disciple, in thy work for thy brother thou hast many allies ; in the winds, in the air, in all the voices of the silent shore." These are the far-wandered powers of our own nature and they turn again home at our need. We came out of the Great Mother-Life for the purposes of soul. Are her dar-

lings forgotten where they darkly wander and strive? Never. Are not the lives of all her heroes proof? Though they seem to stand alone the eternal Mother keeps watch on them, and voices far away and unknown to them before arise in passionate defence, and hearts beat warm to help them. Aye, if we could look within we would see vast nature stirred on their behalf, and institutions shaken, until the truth they fight for triumphs, and they pass, and a wake of glory ever widening behind them trails down the ocean of the years.

Thus the warrior within us works, or, if we choose to phrase it so, it is the action of the spiritual will. Shall we not, then, trust in it and face the unknown defiant and fearless of its dangers. Though we seem to go alone to the high, the lonely, the pure, we need not despair. Let no one bring to this task the mood of the martyr or of one who thinks he sacrifices something. Yet let all who will come. Let them enter the path, facing all things in life and death with a mood at once gay and reverent, as beseems those who are immortal—who are children to-day, but whose hands to-morrow may grasp the sceptre, sitting down with the Gods as equals and companions. “What a man thinks, that he

is: that is the old secret." In this self-conception lies the secret of life, the way of escape and return. We have imagined ourselves into littleness, darkness and feebleness. We must imagine ourselves into greatness. "If thou wilt not equal thyself to God thou canst not understand God. The like is only intelligible by the like." In some moment of more complete imagination the thought-born may go forth and look on the ancient Beauty. So it was in the mysteries long ago and may well be to-day. The poor dead shadow was laid to sleep, forgotten in its darkness, as the fiery power, mounting from heart to head, went forth in radiance. Not then did it rest, nor ought we. The dim worlds dropped behind it, the lights of earth disappeared as it neared the heights of the immortals. There was One seated on a throne, One dark and bright with ethereal glory. It arose in greeting. The radiant figure laid its head against the breast which grew suddenly golden, and Father and Son vanished in that which has no place or name.

III.

*Who are exiles ? as for me
Where beneath the diamond dome
Lies the light on hill or tree
There my palace is and home.*

We are outcasts from Deity ; therefore we defame the place of our exile. But who is there may set apart his destiny from the earth which bore him ? I am one of those who would bring back the old reverence for the Mother, the magic, the love. I think, metaphysician, you have gone astray. You would seek within yourself for the fountain of life. Yes, there is the true, the only light. But do not dream it will lead you further away from the earth, but rather deeper into its heart. By it you are nourished with those living waters you would drink. You are yet in the womb and unborn, and the Mother breathes for you the diviner airs. Dart out your furthest ray of thought to the original, and yet you have not found a new path of your own. Your ray is still enclosed in the parent

ray, and only on the sidereal streams are you borne to the freedom of the deep, to the sacred stars whose distance maddens, and to the lonely Light of Lights.

Let us, therefore, accept the conditions and address ourselves with wonder, with awe, with love, as we well may, to that being in whom we move. I abate no jot of those vaster hopes, yet I would pursue that ardent aspiration, content as to here and to-day. I do not believe in a nature red with tooth and claw. If indeed she appears so terrible to any it is because they themselves have armed her. Again, behind the anger of the Gods there is a love. Are the rocks barren? Lay your brow against them and learn what memories they keep. Is the brown earth unbeautiful? Yet lie on the breast of the Mother and you shall be aureoled with the dews of faery. The earth is the entrance to the Halls of Twilight. What emanations are those that make radiant the dark woods of pine! Round every leaf and tree and over all the mountains wave the fiery tresses of that hidden sun which is the soul of the earth and parent of your soul. But we think of these things no longer. Like the prodigal we have wandered far from our home, but no more return. We idly pass or wait as strangers in the halls our spirit built.

*Sad or fain no more to live ?
I have pressed the lips of pain :
With the kisses lovers give
Ransomed ancient powers again.*

I would raise this shrinking soul to a more universal acceptance. What! does it aspire to the All, and yet deny by its revolt and inner protest the justice of Law? From sorrow we shall take no less and no more than from our joys. For if the one reveals to the soul the mode by which the power overflows and fills it here, the other indicates to it the unalterable will which checks excess and leads it on to true proportion and its own ancestral ideal. Yet men seem for ever to fly from their destiny of inevitable beauty; because of delay the power invites and lures no longer but goes out into the highways with a hand of iron. We look back cheerfully enough upon those old trials out of which we have passed; but we have gleaned only an aftermath of wisdom and missed the full harvest if the will has not risen royally at the moment in unison with the will of the Immortal, even though it comes rolled round with terror and suffering and strikes at the heart of clay.

Through all these things, in doubt, despair, poverty, sick, feeble or baffled, we have yet to learn reliance. "*I will not leave thee or forsake*

thee," are the words of the most ancient spirit to the spark wandering in the immensity of its own being. This high courage brings with it a vision. It sees the true intent in all circumstance out of which its own emerges to meet it. Before it the blackness melts into forms of beauty, and back of all illusions is seen the old enchanter tenderly smiling, the dark, hidden Father enveloping his children.

All things have their compensations. For what is absent here there is always, if we seek, a nobler presence about us.

*Captive, see what stars give light
In the hidden heart of clay :
At their radiance dark and bright
Fades the dreamy King of Day.*

We complain of conditions, but this very imperfection it is which urges us to arise and seek for the Isles of the Immortals. What we lack recalls the fulness. The soul has seen a brighter day than this and a sun which never sets. Hence the retrospect : "Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God ; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, the jasper, the sapphire, emerald . . . Thou wast upon the holy mountain of God ; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire." We would point out

these radiant avenues of return; but sometimes we feel in our hearts that we sound but cockney voices, as guides amid the ancient temples, the cyclopean crypts sanctified by the mysteries. To be intelligible we replace the opalescent shining by the terms of the scientist, and we prate of occult physiology in the same breath with the Most High. Yet when the soul has the vision divine it knows not it has a body. Let it remember, and the breath of glory kindles it no more; it is once again a captive. After all it does not make the mysteries clearer to speak in physical terms and do violence to our intuitions. If we ever use these centres, as fires we shall see them, or they shall well up within us as fountains of potent sound. We may satisfy people's minds with a sense correspondence, and their souls may yet hold aloof. We shall only inspire by the magic of a superior beauty. Yet this too has its dangers. "Thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness," continues the seer. If we follow too much the elusive beauty of form we will miss the spirit. The last secrets are for those who translate vision into being. Does the glory fade away before you? Say truly in your heart, "I care not. I will wear the robes I am endowed with to-day." You are already

become beautiful, being beyond desire and free.

*Night and day no more eclipse
Friendly eyes that on us shine,
Speech from old familiar lips,
Playmates of a youth divine.*

To childhood once again. We must regain the lost state. But it is to the giant and spiritual childhood of the young immortals we must return, when into their clear and translucent souls first fell the rays of the father-beings. The men of old were intimates of wind and wave and playmates of many a brightness long since forgotten. The rapture of the fire was their rest; their outgoing was still consciously through universal being. By darkened images we may figure something vaguely akin, as when in rare moments under the stars the big dreamy heart of childhood is pervaded with quiet and brimmed full with love. Dear children of the world, so tired to-day—so weary seeking after the light. Would you recover strength and immortal vigour? Not one star alone, your star, shall shed its happy light upon you, but the All you must adore. Something intimate, secret, unspeakable, akin to thee, will emerge silently, insensibly, and ally itself with thee as thou

gatherest thyself from the four quarters of the earth. We shall go back to the world of the dawn, but to a brighter light than that which opened up this wondrous story of the cycles. The forms of elder years will reappear in our vision, the father-beings once again. So we shall grow at home amid these grandeurs, and with that All-Presence about us may cry in our hearts, "At last is our meeting, Immortal. Oh, starry one, now is our rest!"

*Brothers weary, come away;
We will quench the heart's desire
Past the gateways of the day
In the rapture of the fire.*

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